

EXPLAINING INFINITY TO A MONKEY: CHALLENGES AND REWARDS OF NVC

by Joseph M. Felser, PhD

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It is hard to imagine anything more jarring than to have returned from the August 25-September 1 LIFELINE at Roberts Mountain Retreat to witness the horrific events of September 11. I was working in my college office in Brooklyn when the terrorist attacks occurred. Acrid yellow-gray clouds of smoke rising from the wreckage of the World Trade Center filled the sky, burning our nostrils. It was, as many kept repeating, “surreal,” “unbelievable,” “like a movie.” The shock and grief seemed too much to bear. My first instinct was to go to Focus 23 to do what I could to help. But I was too upset even for that. Yet, through it all, I knew in my heart that the extraordinary harmony and lightness of spirit I’d experienced on the top of Roberts Mountain only days before represented a deeper insight into reality than the darkness that descended on the morning of 9/11.

Since then, I’ve been trying to make sense of these traumatic events like everyone else. After the initial shock wore off and I could think more clearly, it occurred to me that it was more urgent than ever to understand the inner workings of human consciousness. Almost half a century ago, Carl Jung issued a terse, but apt, warning. “The great danger is psyche,” he declared. In other words, to the extent that we remain ignorant of our own inner lives, we remain threats to ourselves and to the world at large. We abdicate our responsibility for self-awareness at our own individual and collective peril. Therefore, I think we must make a special effort to appreciate what Bob Monroe dubbed nonverbal communication (NVC): the exceedingly subtle feelings, images, and “knowings” that the deep self uses to transfer information.

This had been on my mind ever since the LIFELINE. Now, more than ever, it struck me that there is a real problem with NVC. On the one hand, we readily deal with nonverbal information—especially images—when it comes from the outside. Witness the ubiquitous advertisements, videos, and computer graphics that bombard us all the time. Thus, no one really had to explain in words that the terrorists were attacking not merely innocent people, but also buildings that symbolized our economic and military power. We all understood that on a visceral level.

On the other hand, when the sources of nonverbal data are our own inner states of consciousness, we are often mystified as to their meaning. In relation to our intimate imagery and landscapes, we are but strangers in a strange land. I feel this strongly in my own case. Despite having paid close attention to my dreams and inner states for years, I am still astonished by that source. Frequently I am surprised, and sometimes just plain befuddled, by what I encounter in some of my adventures in the Focus states.

An example from my LIFELINE illustrates this point. One of our final exercises on the last full day of the program was the *Moment of Revelation* tape from the GOING HOME series. As our trainers explained the tape during the briefing, I could feel a knot tighten in the pit of my stomach. “What if I don’t get a revelation?” I moaned inwardly. Talk about putting yourself under pressure! By the time I returned to my CHEC unit I had consciously resolved to just let it be. After all, I had had such a marvelous week, what did it matter even if I dozed off or clicked out on this one? In truth, however, the anxiety and worry remained. What if I didn’t get the prize?

The tape was well guided. I followed along with the instructions, relaxing into the experience of flowing beyond the known universe to that interface with the Great Unknown. I did feel “far out” but, beyond that, sensed only an empty blackness. Suddenly, however, I caught a glimpse of something. I had the impression of a huge auditorium, like an old-fashioned movie theater or playhouse. I was seated in the audience with perhaps a handful of other people. The house lights were dim, and the heavy red velvet drapes that covered the screen or stage were closed. Had the show just ended, I wondered, or was I too early and it hadn’t even begun? It was impossible to tell.

As the image vanished, I felt a rising tide of frustration and anger. “How utterly silly and meaningless,” I whined mentally. I journey to the edge of the known universe, and this is it? My Big Revelation? I returned to full waking consciousness feeling like I’d somehow been cheated. I would have preferred to experience nothing. I don’t know what I was expecting—perhaps a spectacular light show straight out of Kubrick’s 2001. But whatever it was, I was absolutely sure that I didn’t get it.

I sat up in my CHEC unit and began making notes in my journal. Then something totally unexpected happened. I began to chuckle out loud as I suddenly received the flash of an inner “knowing”—one of those handy thought-balls Bob Monroe called a ROTE Absolutely brilliant! What a fool I’d been! As I excitedly unpacked the message of the ROTE and hastily translated it into words and a primitive sketch, the economy of expression and sense of humor displayed by this subtle intelligence amazed me. After all, I mused, how might we go about trying to explain the concept of infinity to, say, a monkey? Well, I had been the monkey. And the image had been a brilliant stroke.

The message of the symbol was now crystal clear. Was the show about to begin, or had it just concluded? Neither. Or, both. Paradoxically, it is always just beginning, always just ending; and yet, it never begins, it never ends. The “show,” of course, is the universe—thoroughly dynamic, always evolving, never resting. The ancient Greek philosopher and visionary Heraclitus described this infinite process as “the ever-living fire.” Later I was reminded of the poetic words that Bob Monroe translated from the ROTE he received during his voyage to the Emitter and described in Ultimate Journey:

There is no beginning, there is no end,
There is only change.
There is no teacher, there is no student,
There is only remembering.
There is no stasis, there is no entropy,
There is only motion.

When I shared my story with the rest of the group in the debriefing session, everyone had a good laugh (including yours truly). But I think there is a serious point here that everyone should consider. We owe it not merely to ourselves, but to each other, to pay attention to our psyche—the ancient Greek word for “soul.” We must learn to respect and understand the language of the psyche, even though (and perhaps especially because) that language is different from what we are used to and what feels most comfortable to us. This is our responsibility. If we wish to create a more harmonious world, we can’t forget that charity begins at home. That’s what I remembered at LIFELINE.

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